

Edison Building
601 West Fifth Street
Los Angeles
Los Angeles County
California

HABS No. CA-2151

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Edison Building

HABS NO.
CA-2151

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57-

1. Location: 601 West Fifth Street, Los Angeles, Ca. 90017-
2. Present Owner: Rock-Bunker, Inc.
3. Present Use: Office Building
4. Present Occupant: Various offices
5. Significance: The building was designed by the prominent architectural firm of Allison and Allison. Opened on March 20, 1931, it was the first major all-electric heated and cooled building in the western United States. The building was built for Southern California Edison as its headquarters.

The building is significant for combining innovative construction features and contemporary architectural treatments. In addition to the modern heating and cooling features, it was designed to be earthquake resistant. The architectural treatment of the pyramidal setback culminating in a tower is characteristic of "modern" buildings of the 1920's and 1930's. The interior contains representative work of several artists of prominence, including Hugo Ballin, Barse Miller, Conrad Buff, and E. Batchelder.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: 1929 (City of Los Angeles, building permits)
2. Architects: Allison and Allison

Allison and Allison - The firm of Allison and Allison designed a large number of significant structures throughout the Southwest, and in particular in Southern California.

The firm was responsible for supervising design plans for the University of California at Los Angeles. In addition to the Friday Morning Club and the Southern California Edison Company Building, Allison and Allison designed the University Club, Shakespeare Club, and the Women's Athletic Club.

Senior member of this firm was David Clark Allison. Born in 1881, Allison was educated at the University of Pennsylvania and later studied at the Ecole Des Beaux Arts, Paris. Allison moved to Los Angeles in 1910 and immediately established a successful practice in architecture.

3. Original and Subsequent Owners:

- 1928 Deed No. 1250, recorded August 25, 1928,
in Book 7224, page 226
R. A. Rowan Co. to Edison Securities
Company
- 1929 Deed No. 1151, recorded December 29, 1929,
in Book 12884, page 171
Edison Securities Company to Southern
California Edison Co.
- 1971 Deed 449, recorded December 29, 1971
Southern California Edison Company to
One Bunker Hill Company
- 1971 Deed 451, recorded December 29, 1971
One Bunker Hill Co. to Mortgage Growth
Investors, all real property excepting
all buildings and improvements located
on the property
- 1971 Deed 452, recorded December 29, 1971
One Bunker Hill Co. to Mortgage Growth
Investors, all buildings and improvements
on subject real property
- 1980 Deed No. 80-106142, recorded January 30, 1980
Mortgage Growth Investors to Rock-Bunker,
Inc., all real property including buildings
and improvements
- 1980 This deed was re-recorded as Deed No. 80-140290
on February 7, 1980, with additional wording
including a reference to 1971 grant deed
No. 452

4. Builder: P. J. Walker

5. Original Plans and Construction: Not located

6. Alterations and additions: There have been some
minor alterations to the exterior including the
removal of the Edison name from the top of the
tower and additional signs at the entrance rotunda.
The building is connected by means of an enclosed
and elevated walkway to a building facing on Hope
Street.

- B. Historical Context: The development of the Edison Building site was part of the development of Fifth Street west of Grand in the late 1920's.

Although the City of Los Angeles had owned a right-of-way for Fifth Street west of Grand Avenue for some time, the street was not extended until the Los Angeles Normal School was relocated to make way for the Los Angeles Central Library (a National Register landmark) in 1925. With the opening up of Fifth Street, and the continued development around Pershing Square on the east, the Edison site at the corner of Fifth and Grand was on the fringes of the then "new" downtown.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The structure consists of an irregular multi-story building of up to fourteen stories with a basement. Major architectural features include a pyramidal feature of many American buildings in the late 1920's and throughout the 1930's. The lower portion of the exterior is faced in Indiana limestone with a granite base. The upper stories are faced with terra-cotta.

The ground floor has a polygonal shaped corner entrance with carved bas-relief panels by Merrell Gage. The entrance has a granite floor and base with stone walls and a decorated domed ceiling.

The overall architectural style is a blend of Zig Zag and WPA moderne. The facade of the structure is virtually intact. Alterations are minor and are largely confined to the tower area.

2. Condition of Fabric: excellent

B. Exterior Description:

1. Over-all Dimensions: The building is located on a lot of .586 acres. The frontage is 170.40' and the depth is 176'.
2. Foundations: The building has reinforced concrete foundations.
3. Walls: The walls are built of 10" reinforced concrete with 8" stone facing. The wall surfaces are articulated by vertical ribs and the setback configuration.
4. Structural System: The building is of steel frame construction with reinforced concrete, brick and tile construction. It has interior partitions of metal and lath and is of fireproof construction.
5. Porches, Stoops, Balconys, Bulkheads: none
6. Chimneys: none
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and Doors: The central entrance is located at the corner of Fifth Street and Grand Avenue. It consists of a turreted entrance surrounded with segmental arches and applied decoration. The doorway configuration is flat and the doors are of metal construction.

- b. Windows and Shutters: The windows are flat in configuration, are of the sash type, and are set back and into the vertical bands of the wall surface.

8. Roof:

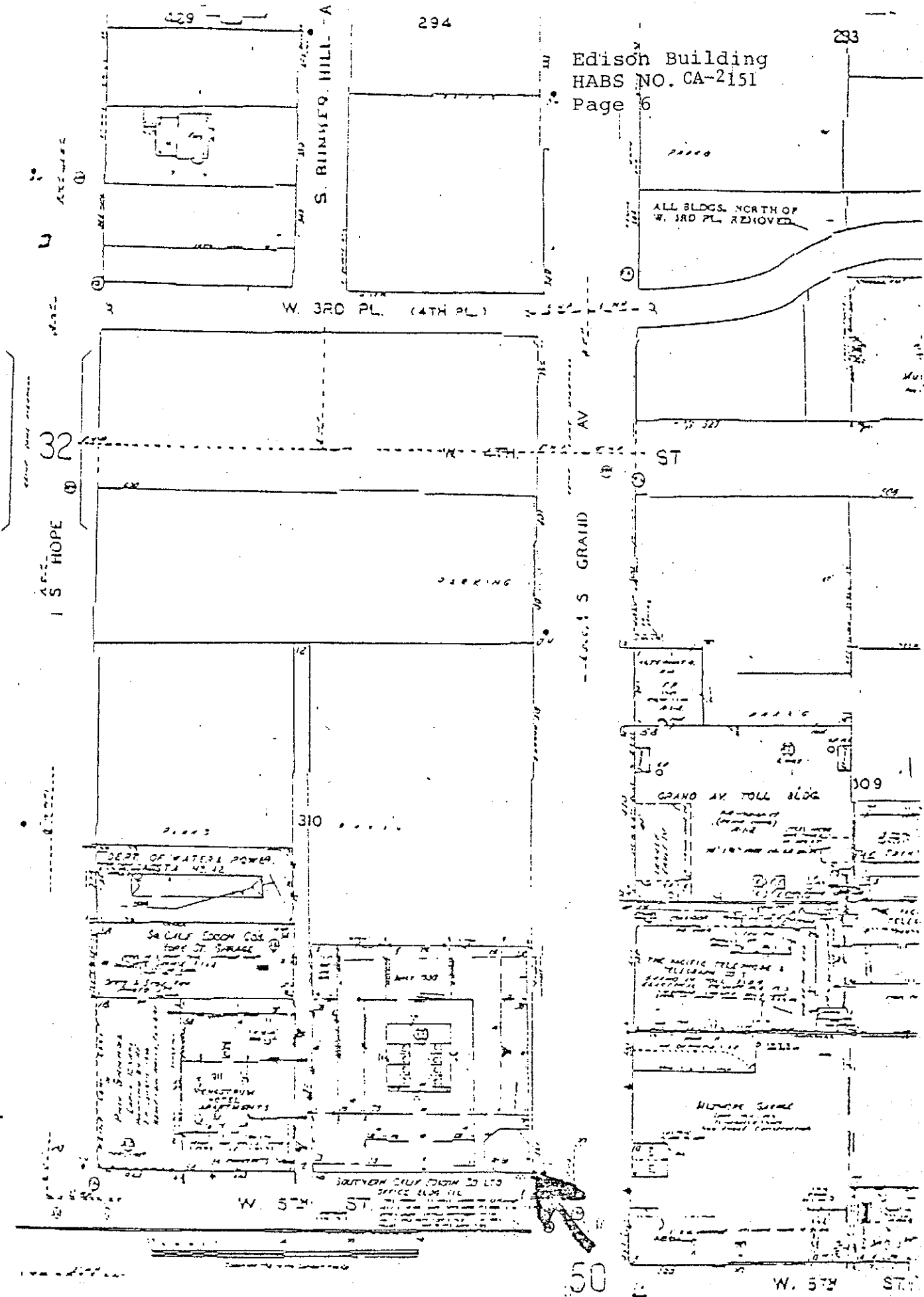
- a. Shape, Covering: The roof is flat and has a composite covering.
- b. Cornice, Eaves: There is a cornice consisting of applied decoration in the attic story. A cornice of applied decoration also runs across the setback above the second story.
- c. Dormers, Cupolas, Towers: The building culminates in a tower of square proportions with austere wall surfaces and applied decorative screens set into ventilator openings.

- C. Description of the Interior: Since this submission refers only to exterior recordation of the structure, only a brief description of interior details is included.

Entrance to the elevator lobby is gained by passing through a large corridor with marble floors and a Spanish Renaissance ceiling. At the far end of this corridor, there is a large painting by Hugo Ballin. Other murals represent the work of Barse Miller and Conrad Buff.

D. Site:

- 1. General Setting and Orientation: The Edison Building is located at the corner of Fifth Street and Grand Avenue. It is a prominent visual landmark which is oriented on a cross axis/corner entrance. The hillside location and steppedbacked design add greatly to the visual significance of the site.
- 2. Historical Landscape Design: The building is associated with the Fifth Street Retaining Wall. (Please refer to the Fifth Street Retaining Wall form for additional information).
- 3. Outbuildings: One adjoining structure directly to the west.



PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

City of Los Angeles, Department of Building and
Safety, Building Permits

City of Los Angeles, Department of Planning,
Land Use Planning and Management System

County of Los Angeles, Recorder's Office,
Official Records of the County of Los Angeles

2. Secondary Sources:

Architectural Digest, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 91-100

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(G. W. Baist Co., Philadelphia, Pa.: 1905)

Hatheway, Roger G., "Historic Building Survey:
Request for Determination of Eligibility"
(Los Angeles Downtown People Mover Program:
January, 1979).

Los Angeles Times, June 24, 1928, V, 1.

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Sanborn Map Company, Los Angeles Fire Insurance Maps
(New York: 1883, 1927, 1958).

Southwest Builder and Contractor, March 6, 1931, P.41

_____, May 22, 1931, pp.47-48

Works Projects Administration, Los Angeles Drawings
(Los Angeles, 1939).

Prepare by: Myra L Frank,
Senior Transportation
Planner
Roger G. Hatheway,
Consulting Research
Historian
Los Angeles Downtown
People Mover Authority
October, 1980

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Los Angeles Downtown People Mover Project, supported by a demonstration grant from the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, is proposing to build an automated, grade-separated transit system in downtown Los Angeles.

A portion of the route as proposed would run along the north side of Fifth Street in front of the Edison Building approximately 21 to 28 feet above the level of the sidewalk. Locating the DPM in front of the building will not require alterations to the structure, but will create a new visual element in front of the structure.